



SARA CORNING CENTRE FOR GENOCIDE EDUCATION

45 Hallercrown Place, Toronto, ON M2J 4Y4 | www.corningcentre.org | info@corningcentre.org

Unit Title

Twelve Ways to Deny a Genocide

Lesson Title

Understanding Genocide Denial

Developers

Maral Deveci, OCT; Raffi Sarkissian, OCT

Learning Objectives

By the end of this, lesson students will be able to

- define genocide denial;
- explain the ways perpetrators deny genocide;
- understand the consequences of genocide denial for victims, perpetrators, and upstanders; and
- explain how denial can be considered part of the crime of genocide.

Materials

- Armenian Genocide Museum of America: introductory video
- “What I Know, What I’ve Learned”
- Prof. Gregory Stanton: “Denial”
- Prof. Gregory Stanton: “Cost of Denial”
- “Twelve Ways to Deny a Genocide”

Background for Teachers

This lesson uses short texts from the genocide scholar Gregory Stanton and an 8 min video to learn about genocide denial. The activities can be geared toward historical discussions of specific genocides or general discussions about avoiding responsibility in a broad sense.

Assessment Strategies

- Observation
- Presentation
- Oral question & answer
- Demonstration or exhibition
- Response journal

Activity

1. Write the key term “denial” on the board.
2. Show students [this introductory video](#) created by the Armenian Genocide Museum of America.



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3. Distribute the “What I Know, What I’ve Learned” handout. Ask students to complete the “What I Know” section and to share what they’ve written. You might prompt them by asking how they would define the word *denial*. You could invite them to share examples of genocide denial—or denial of any sort of misdeed—that they already know about. Record their responses in a word cloud.
4. Distribute Stanton’s “Denial.” Read it as a class and have students discuss the following questions. Have them share their answers.
 - Why might a perpetrator deny a crime?
 - If you were to hear or read genocide denial, would you respond? Why or why not?
 - Do you agree that genocide denial should be punished by international tribunals and national courts? If so, why? If not, how else should it be addressed?
5. Have students make a text-to-self connection with the following prompt. Ask them to share their answers with the class.
 - Think about a time when you or someone else faced denial of some misdeed. How did it make you or this other person feel? How was the situation dealt with?
6. Distribute Stanton’s “Cost of Denial.” Divide the class into four expert groups, and have each group work on one of the following questions and record their discussion on chart paper. Allow each group to present its findings.
 - Why do you think denial is the last stage of genocide?
 - How might denial harm survivors and their descendants?
 - How might denial harm perpetrators and their descendants?
 - How might denial harm upstanders?
7. Distribute and read “Twelve Ways to Deny a Genocide.” Read and discuss each item.
 - Culminating Assessment Idea: Ask students to choose a genocide (e.g., Native American, Armenian, Cambodian, etc.) and describe the ways it’s been denied in the past or at present.
8. Ask students to complete the “What I’ve Learned” section of the “What I Know, What I’ve Learned” handout and to submit it to you.
9. Ask students to reflect on the connections between what they’ve learned and the world they live in. For example, are any local or global events happening because of denial? How can we prevent such things from happening? Why don’t people and countries want to take responsibility for their mistakes?
 - You might start your next lesson by presenting, or having students present, these reflections.

What I Know

What I've Learned

GENOCIDEWATCH

DENIAL

By Dr. Gregory H. Stanton
President, Genocide Watch

Denial is the final stage that lasts throughout and always follows genocide. It is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres. The perpetrators of genocide dig up the mass graves, burn the bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses. They deny that they committed any crimes, and often blame what happened on the victims. Acts of genocide are disguised as counter-insurgency if there is an ongoing armed conflict or civil war. Perpetrators block investigations of the crimes, and continue to govern until driven from power by force, when they flee into exile. There they remain with impunity, like Pol Pot or Idi Amin, unless they are captured and a tribunal is established to try them.

During and after genocide, lawyers, diplomats, and others who oppose forceful action often deny that these crimes meet the definition of genocide. They call them euphemisms like “ethnic cleansing” instead. They question whether intent to destroy a group can be proven, ignoring thousands of murders. They overlook deliberate imposition of conditions that destroy part of a group. They claim that only courts can determine whether there has been genocide, demanding “proof beyond a reasonable doubt,” when prevention only requires action based on compelling evidence.

The best response to denial is punishment by an international tribunal or national courts. There the evidence can be heard, and the perpetrators punished. Tribunals like the Yugoslav, Rwanda or Sierra Leone Tribunals, the tribunal to try the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, or the International Criminal Court may not deter the worst genocidal killers. But with the political will to arrest and prosecute them, some may be brought to justice. Local justice and truth commissions and public-school education are also antidotes to denial. They may open ways to reconciliation and preventive education.

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source: <https://www.genocidewatch.com/tenstages>

GENOCIDEWATCH

COST OF DENIAL

By Dr. Gregory H. Stanton
President, Genocide Watch
2007–2009 President, International Association of Genocide Scholars

[...] In my studies of genocide, I have discovered that the process of every genocide has predictable stages. They aren't linear, because they usually operate simultaneously. But there is a logical order to them, because a "later" stage cannot occur without a logically "prior" stage. It is also useful to distinguish them, because they can help us see when genocide is coming and what governments can do to prevent it.

→ The first is Classification, when we classify the world into us versus them.

→ The second is Symbolization, when we give names to those classifications like Jew and Aryan, Hutu and Tutsi, Turk and Armenian. Sometimes the symbols are physical, like the Nazi yellow star.

→ The third is Dehumanization, when perpetrators call their victims rats, or cockroaches, cancer, or disease; so eliminating them is actually seen as "cleansing" the society, rather than murder.

→ The fourth is Organization, when hate groups, armies, and militias organize.

→ The fifth is Polarization, when moderates are targeted who could stop the process, especially moderates from the perpetrators' group.

→ The sixth stage is Preparation, when the perpetrators are trained and armed, victims are identified, transported and concentrated.

→ The seventh stage is Extermination, what we legally define as genocide, the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

When I first outlined these stages in a memo I wrote in the State Department in 1996, I thought these seven stages are all there are. Then I realized there is an eighth stage in every genocide: → Denial. It is actually a continuation of the genocide, because it is a continuing attempt to destroy the victim group psychologically and culturally, to deny its members even the memory of the murders of their relatives.

Denial has a profoundly negative impact on everyone concerned. [...]

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source: <https://www.genocidewatch.com/cost-of-denial>



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Twelve Ways to Deny a Genocide

This text paraphrases and quotes from Gregory Stanton's much longer article "Twelve Ways to Deny a Genocide."¹ In that piece, Stanton adapted Israel Charny's list of denial tactics² to explain how the Darfuri Genocide was being denied in 2005. The Corning Centre has summarized and generalized Stanton's article to make it useful for different topics.

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1. **Question and minimize the statistics.** Use false or misleading statistics to trivialize the events and distract from the real issues.
2. **Attack the motivations of the truth-tellers** by claiming that survivors and upstanders who tell the truth are disingenuous and have hidden intentions.
3. **Claim that the deaths were accidental.** For example, say that there was an epidemic or famine, not wilful murder.
4. **Emphasize the strangeness of the victims.** Insist that they are impossible to understand and, therefore, should be ignored.
5. **Rationalize the deaths as rooted in ancient hatreds**, meaning that they were inevitable.
6. **Blame out-of-control forces.** Say that the real criminals were rebels or extremists that the government could not possibly have controlled.
7. **Ask for patience with the perpetrators so that they don't walk out of a peace process.** Say that we shouldn't anger or upset them if they are genuinely trying to resolve the issue.
8. **Emphasize current economic interests.** Imply that economic relationships are more important than human rights or something that happened in the past. Use your economic position to blackmail or bribe influential people and countries.
9. **Claim that the victims were actually receiving good treatment.** Exaggerate or fabricate evidence to argue that genocide could not possibly have been taking place.
10. **Claim that what is going on doesn't fit the definition of genocide**, thereby muddying the waters, sowing confusion, and avoiding responsibility.
11. **Blame the victims** by accusing them of rebellion or mass violence. Make any actions that you do admit to seem fair and legitimate.
12. **Say that peace and reconciliation are more important than pointing fingers.** Try to sweep the issue under the rug by making an appeal to "more important things," thereby avoiding punishment and making denial permanent.

¹ <https://www.genocidewatch.com/twelve-ways-to-deny-genocide>

² *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, edited by Israel W. Charny (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 168.